

# The roots and development of Serbian Islamophobia

The correlation between nationalism and Islamophobia in Serbia

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### *On mourning*

*“If they were to give me a whole world of Serbians to kill and told me to seek revenge for my children, I couldn’t imagine it – let alone carry the weight of the guilt because sadness and grief have remained my only friends. I have nothing more.”<sup>1</sup>*

*- Hatidza Mehmedović, survivor from Srebrenica*

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<sup>1</sup> (Mujkanović, 2022)

## Abstract

*The history of Serbia is an entangled web of notions, comprising romanticised folklores, violent massacres and a strong sense of identity. Anti-Muslim sentiments and Serbian nationalism are intertwined tendencies that reaches far back to the medieval history of Serbia, laying the groundwork for the contemporary islamophobia that is so prevailing in the country today. Islamophobia in the Balkans is not restricted to the Serbians, but a larger movement that is rooted in old and institutionalized hostility for the Ottomans that were occupying vast areas within the Balkans up until the early 20th century. Why this essay focuses on Serbia, is due to the extensive documentation of the close connection between nationalistic and Islamophobic beliefs within society, manifested as Serbianisation in early popular folklore literature and developed further as Serbian ethnonationalism, incorporated in the modern political discourse, and within the society per se. The immediate dangers of these notions are manifested and further strengthened by the violent reality that has ensued them consequently and parallelly, as the Bukovica massacre during the Second World War perpetrated by the Chetniks, and the Srebrenica genocide during the Bosnian war, where thousands of Bosniak men and boys were murdered by the Bosnian Serb army. The text will find that Serbian nationalism is not merely an incentive for islamophobia but that the former and latter are reinforcing imperatives, aiming to validate one another. Moreover, the largely romanticised patriotic self-image of the Serb has been rebranded as superior and almost holy-like, thus using it as a justification for the atrocities committed its name, as a necessary mean towards the goal of a greater Serbia (Serbism).*

## Introduction

Ever since the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, where the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović was killed by the Ottoman forces led by Sultan Murad Hüdavendigâr, the blood of the descendants of Prince Lazar's killers would symbolise the baptism of the Serbian nation<sup>2</sup>. Most of the early South Slavs were formerly Pagans, yet as the tide of Christendom swept over most of Europe, it also became the place where Catholic

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<sup>2</sup> (Spahic, 2024)

Church met its Orthodox counterpart. It was, as described by author Jacob Mikanowski; “[...] the border between Rome and Constantinople, Latin and Greek, Gothic spires and wooden domes.”<sup>3</sup>. Following the invasion of the Ottomans in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Balkan Peninsula, this area also became the border between the east and the west, Christendom and Islam. There were, however, groups of other religions as well, enriching the region and providing a necessarily multifaceted picture of its history. As Serbia was under Ottoman rule for an extensive amount of time, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it both adapted and resisted in ways that were forming for the modern Serbian history. As the opposition towards the Ottomans and nationalism towards Serbia grew stronger during the rule, the Serbs who converted were viewed as traitors. Not only was it considered a betrayal towards the Serbian community but as an “illness”, hence converting was not only a matter of religion but of ethnicity, as these were equated in the name of a more encompassing understanding of Serbian identity<sup>4</sup>. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, islamophobia was further articulated and rebranded, as Serbia was part of and under Yugoslavia for most of the time, and the active Ottoman threat was no longer relevant in its same form. The abhorrence towards the non-Serbian would still endure, however, and remained closely linked with the Serbian dream of an ethnostate, which eventually culminated in the 80s following the ex-Yugoslav leader Joseph Broz Tito’s death. The pledge for independence amongst the ex-Yugoslav states was strong, and due to territorial, religious and ethnic dispute it resulted in a series of Yugoslav wars. The Balkan war and the following massacre in Srebrenica was the longest and most painful, sparked by the long existing ideology of Serbism that denied independence for the multi-ethnic socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and issued war and ethnic cleansing, resulting in the death of approximately 100 000 civilians, the displacement of over 2 million people and the between 20 000 and 50 000 women being systematically raped<sup>5</sup>. Recognizing the older history of Serbia as relevant to the cause of these horrors is what this text seeks to do, without relativising or diminishing the lived experience of history. Hence, this paper seeks to investigate the reasons for the strong link between Serbian nationalism and identity and religious

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<sup>3</sup> (Mikanowski, 2024, p. 42)

<sup>4</sup> (Spahic, 2024)

<sup>5</sup> (Kostura, 2021)

orientation, and how we can trace the correlation between modern day islamophobia and Serbian ethnocentrism to ancient notions of Serbianisation and anti-Islam sentiments.

## The pre-Ottoman era

### Zakonopravilo and early Serbian nationalism

Within the historical narratives of Serbian traditional scholarship, the connection between state-independence and church independence is essential. As the independence of the Serbian church followed only two years after the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbia, it laid the groundwork for its very fundamental values. As religion played such a pivotal role for the legitimacy of Serbia, it was necessary to define its framework to collectivise the Serbs, and even more so, to filter out people that were not conforming with the regnant faith, namely Orthodox Christendom. Spearheading the emergence and later dominance of the Serbian Church was the Orthodox Christian scholar Saint Sava, whose literary work *Zakonopravilo* comprised a legal system that would serve “to organize and sustain the functioning”<sup>6</sup> of the newly established state. Saint Sava was himself largely responsible for the independency of the Serbian church after having succeeded in persuading the leadership of the Eastern Orthodox Church based in Constantinople of the legitimized status of self-determination for the Serbian Orthodox Church. Hence, one could argue that the very foundation of the Church’s position can be attributed to the work of Saint Sava, even though much of his work were borrowed from a variety of Byzantine sources<sup>7</sup>. As one of the undertakings of the book is to define some sort of Serbian core, which naturally is that of a Christian Orthodox character, he paints a picture of Islam as one of the heresies to Christianity and aims to prevent the Christian Serbs against actual encounters with Muslims by creating set stereotypes built on borrowed myths. The latter statement is demonstrated through Sava’s chapter on Islam, named “Articles about Heresy”, in which he writes among other

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<sup>6</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 27)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

things: “Islam is the forerunner of the Antichrist. The only goal of Islam is to dupe and cheat people”<sup>8</sup>. The reason for his deliberate disparage of Islam, can be argued to be his anticipation of its arrival in the region not long before the Battle of Kosovo, in which The Ottomans started gaining control over what up until then had been The Kingdom of Serbia. This suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that anti-Islamic attitudes during the reformation were closely linked to the fear of Islamic governance, as impersonated through the leading reformist of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther in contemplating the possibility of Turkish (Muslim) rule articulated his prediction clearly: “Let us now prepare ourselves against Muhammad”<sup>9</sup>. Serbian nationalism is therefore not only a matter of nationality or ethnicity, but comprises also the religious aspect, as the correlation between being Orthodox Christian and a Serbian nationalist was perceived as a given. The ideology of Serbism hence becomes both a fundamental value and an ancient reason for hostility towards the Bosniaks, as they allegedly imposed a direct threat towards both the nationalistic and the religious compounds of Serbism.

## The Antemurale-myth

The Balkan became a land in between. As later scholars have denoted it as the “gate to the Orient”<sup>10</sup>, the region has been an epicentre for mutual trade, and of mutual wars. With the expansion of the Ottoman empire, many Christian rulers of Balkan and Eastern European countries took on the role of self-proclaimed protectors of the European – hence Christian faith, and “presented themselves as the last bastion against Muslim onslaught.”<sup>11</sup>. Thereby, the Antemurale-myth was instigated, and kept alive through notions of nobility. As Pål Kolstø notes in the book *Rampart nations*, the Antemurale - myth, *murus* literally meaning “wall” in Latin, has traditionally been referring to Eastern Europe presenting itself as the “very outpost of the Catholic Christianity against the sinister and threatening “Others” [...]”<sup>12</sup>, which in that context is the threat of Orthodox Christianity. However, the term encapsulates the case of Serbia as well, where the state used the myth as a defence strategy against the pressing threat of Ottoman invasion.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>10</sup> (Gingrich, 1996)

<sup>11</sup> (Mikanowski, 2024, p. 43)

<sup>12</sup> (Kolstø, 2019)

The myth is propaganda, but it is also very telling of the current political situation. Creating a somewhat David vs Goliath fiction, Serbia, along with other Balkan states, could put on the role as self-sacrificing heroes whilst simultaneously strengthen their own nationalist goals by defining themselves as integral and indispensable intermediaries between the religious dichotomy of Christianity and Islam, and moreover, detect the threat of the external “Other”, namely the Ottomans.

## During the Ottomans

### Njegoš and the rebirth of Serbia

Islamophobia is far from a new phenomenon and has by the definition: “The excessive and empirically unjustifiable fear, hatred of or bias against Islam, Muslims and Islamic civilization which are translated into policies, attitudes, language, literature and into condoned individual, along with other collective, behavioural patterns”<sup>13</sup>, existed since the very emergence of Islam itself. As with the death of prince Lazar in the Battle of Kosovo, the *Kosovo myth* is standing as one of tragical loss and spirals a nationalistic desire for eternal vengeance, the blood of the descendants of Lazar’s killers would serve as a canonized symbol of the baptism of the rebirth of Serbian nationalism, grotesquely painting a picture of the Serbian hero, embodied in the legendary character of Marko Kraljevic, one that was further developed and manifested by the Montenegrin author and national figure Njegoš. In his most famous literary work, *The Mountain Wreath*, the prophet Muhammed is presented as the greatest falsifier and heretic of Christendom, and Islam as such is portrayed as the religion of sword (meaning violent oppression) and Muslims as “bloodthirsty fanatics and the destroyers of every terrestrial good”<sup>14</sup>. From this it can be argued that *The Mountain Wreath* is both an outline for Islamophobia and foster a form of political populism, as his work was regarded a popular masterpiece, still relevant, and even referred to by one of the main perpetrators for the Srebrenica genocide, Radovan Karadžić, for instance in the 17th Assembly session, where he reportedly said: “Last night in the caucus meeting we talked about Njegoš a lot, and we

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<sup>13</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. X)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 56

feel that every verse by Njegoš reflects the situation that we are in now”<sup>15</sup>. How can an author of popular folklore literature still be quoted by Serbian politician almost 200 years after his death? Petar II Petrovic Njegoš, was born in the village of Njegusi, close to the former capital of Montenegro, Cetinje. He lived a life in intellectual solitude, as one of the very few people in his environment that was able to read and write (even most of the priests at his time were illiterate) and as both an outcast and middlemen, he famously considered himself “a ruler among barbarians, and a barbarian among rulers”<sup>16</sup>. Njegoš neither lived to see the Serbian revolution nor the Serbian-Ottoman wars, yet his disdain for the Muslims and, what he derives as the necessary “purification” of Serbia, remains strong as a mean towards his dream of a greater Serbia. *The Mountain Wreath* was treated as a sacred scripture. It was not merely a collection of poems, but a guide urging Serbs to regain their “racial awareness”, completely disregarding the existence of the local Muslim population, since peaceful coexistence in itself was a paradox in his opinion, as if wolfs and sheep would ever live in harmony, and portraying them as the enemy among saints, hence coexistence would “entertain the devil in the Serbian Christian land”<sup>17</sup>. The book can rightly be called a blueprint for genocide, as ethnic cleansing of the Muslim is portrayed as both inevitable and desirable: “Our struggle won’t come to an end until; we or the Turks are exterminated”<sup>18</sup>, and in one of the passages of the book, Njegoš describes a massacre of the local Muslim population, that took place in Cetinje during Christmas Eve in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The massacre was carried out by Prince Danilo I, towards the Muslim population who refused to get baptised, whereas the Muslims responds with a universal analogy, suggesting that their own hair-cutting ceremony is in many ways similar to the Christian baptism, and that religious tolerance should triumph the narrowmindedness and hatred of “ethnic purity”:

*SMALL ENOUGH IS OUR LAND,  
YET TWO FAITHS THERE STILL MAY BE  
AS IN ONE BOWL SOUPS MAY AGREE  
LET US STILL AS BROTHERS LIVE.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 48

<sup>16</sup> (Javarek, 1952, p. 1)

<sup>17</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 38)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>19</sup> (Žižek, 2009, p. 464)

Prince Danilo I did not agree with this entreaty, and ordered for an indiscriminate massacre of both men, women and children, as they were all “race traitors”. Moreover, the massacre itself was seen both as an obligation and duty towards the country, but it was also later framed by the Serbian Orthodox church not as an act of blood vengeance making justice with the killing of Prince Lazar, but “as an act sacred in itself, with the implications of baptism by blood”<sup>20</sup>, and hence the order was allegedly restored and the legitimacy of both Serbism and the Serbian Orthodox church canonized through the process<sup>21</sup>.

## The greater Serbia

### The Chetniks and the global repercussion of Serbism

The Serbian nationalism grew stronger, fuelled by the brutal oppression by Ottoman rule leading up to the Serbian-Ottoman wars that ended in 1878. The Principality of Serbia, which came into being in the aftermath of the Serbian Revolution in 1804, was officially recognized through The Congress in Berlin in the same year (1878) and the country was later changed to the status of kingdom. As the country gained more territory through the First and Second Balkan Wars, the ideology of Serbism prevailed as a dominant motive for expansion of Serbian territory, this also being one of the incentives for the Bosnian Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassination of the archduke Franz Ferdinand, supported by the nationalist military organisation Black September (also called Unification or Death), as they were seeking to break the southern Slav provinces from the Austro-Hungarian Empire<sup>22</sup>. Serbian nationalism played a significant part on a global scale, and their continuous pledge for expansion coupled with anti-Islamic sentiments. This was further proven during the second World War, when the Serbian nationalist movement the Chetniks opposing their occupied Yugoslav authority, were responsible for the Bukovica massacre, killing over 500 civilians (Bosnian Muslims), as part of the Montenegrin Serb and Officer of the Yugoslav Royal Army, Pavle Đurišić's, ethnic

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<sup>20</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 42)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> (Cohen, 1997)

cleansing campaign in 1943<sup>23</sup>. The Chetniks were also massacring 67 civilians in the village of Vranic as they were launching a campaign against the Partisans, their main rival resistance force within occupied Yugoslavia<sup>24</sup>. The Chetniks were supported by the Allied forces, as they were opposing their own Axis occupier and Yugoslavia as such, in the strive for Serbian monarchy on the throne of Yugoslavia and the expansion of Serbia within Yugoslavia. Even more so, their strong nationalist tendency went hand in hand with their strong hate for the Muslims inside Serbian and Bosnian territories and considered the erasure of Muslims as a pivotal mean in the strive for an ethnic cleansed Serbia. The relation between the strong anti-Muslim sentiment and the dream of a Greater Serbia, and the Serbian folklores describing these sentiments becomes obvious with the fact that only two years after the Bukovica massacre, Serbians were celebrating the anniversary of Njegoš, the book that canonized massacring Muslims in the name “purification”<sup>25</sup>.

## The genocide in Srebrenica

Fast forward to the dissolution of Yugoslavia that started with the death of Yugoslav leader Joseph Broz Tito and engendering the successional Yugoslav wars, of which the Bosnian war was the most violent and bloody. As the president of Serbia and later the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), Slobodan Milošević was promoting the unity of the former Yugoslavia, he had gained a majority voting bloc by having close allies governing the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina and the republic of Montenegro. Ethnic dispute and the strive for independence amongst the Yugoslav republics coupled with the collaboration between the Bosnian Serb army and the Federal Yugoslav army in crippling internal rebellions<sup>26</sup>. The situation in Bosnia consisted of an entangled web of a multi-ethnic demographic and different religions, with consequently different interests in the region. As the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) had broken down and either separated into independent countries such as with most of the former Yugoslav Republics, Bosnia and Herzegovina remained the epicentre for the continuous conflict, mainly between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, comprising Serbia and Montenegro,

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<sup>23</sup> (Finn, 2023)

<sup>24</sup> (Nikolic, 2019)

<sup>25</sup> (Spahic, 2024)

<sup>26</sup> (Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism (CISA), 2022)

and Croatia. As Bosnia and Herzegovina had both a significant percentage of Bosnian Serbs (ca. 31 %) and Bosnian Croats (ca. 17%)<sup>27</sup>, they both had similar ideas of taking control over their two majority populated areas within Bosnia respectively, notwithstanding the fact that in the output of the Bosnian war, Serbia and Croatia were allied against the common enemy of Serbia<sup>28</sup>. In 1992, Bosnia voted with an almost unanimous majority in favour for independence, despite the leader of the newly established Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić warning against the referendum:

*I warn you; you'll drag Bosnia to hell.  
You Muslims aren't ready for war; you could face extinction.*<sup>29</sup>

One of the biggest failures of the UN regarding the Srebrenica massacre is considered to have been their failure to call for support from the already stationed forces within the enclave, hence allowing the Bosnian Serbs to surround what the UN had considered a safe zone, and to massacre over 8,000 Bosniak boys and men, and to rape, beat, execute and torture an even larger amount of people in the quest of conquering Srebrenica<sup>30</sup>. The genocide in Srebrenica was not merely a quest for territory, it was a genocide where the strategy was to ethnically cleanse Bosnia with the planned, systematic and industrial killings of non-Serbs, the majority being Bosniak-Muslims<sup>31</sup>. The main perpetrators of the Srebrenica massacre was the President of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, the president of Serbia Slobodan Milošević and the military officer of the Bosnian Serb Army, Radko Mladić, but the genocide was also marked by the absence of international community, and even more so, by the Serbian Orthodox church who, by providing “[...] the vocabulary and mythology to sanctify ethno-nationalist rationalizations of genocide”<sup>32</sup>, played a pivotal role, both in a symbolical and institutional sense.

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<sup>27</sup> (RFE/RL's Balkan Service, 2013)

<sup>28</sup> (Daalder, 1998)

<sup>29</sup> (Canadian Institute for the Study of Antisemitism (CISA), 2022)

<sup>30</sup> (Kostura, 2021)

<sup>31</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 1995)

<sup>32</sup> (Tétreault, 1998, p. 279)

## Kosovo – the “Jerusalem of Serbia”

Kosovo is said to be the “Jerusalem of Serbia”<sup>33</sup>, with major religious and ethnic disputes. After years of war, ethnic cleansing and international intervention, the “Kosovo-question” is still far from resolved and Kosovo remains a hotbed for territorial and nationalist interest to compete. The Kosovo war between 1998 and 1999 comprised a genocide against Albanian Muslims who made up the majority of the population in Kosovo, killing nearly 10,000 Kosovo-Albanians (Muslim) and displacing, both internally and externally, between 1,2 and 1,45 million people<sup>34</sup>. The causes of the Kosovo war, and the ethnic cleansing that was part of it, was the Serbian minority in Kosovo’s, along with the government of Milošević, perpetrated by the Yugoslav army, the Serbian police and Serb paramilitary groups<sup>35</sup>. As Kosovo were striving for independence in the aftermath of the Yugoslav dissolution, it became the hotbed for reclaiming Serbian identity and a final attempt to cling onto the what was left of the Serbian-centred Yugoslavia.

## Serbian nationalism in the west

### Trifković and pseudo-intellectuality

By looking into the various ways in which Serbianisation, Serbism and anti-Islamic sentiments has fuelled one another, manifested themselves and played out in practice, the contemporary situation of Serbian nationalism and Islamophobia comes into question. How does the ancient notions of Islamophobia, as illustrated in the Middle Age literature alongside with the ideology of Serbism, as embodied by Serb leaders during the Yugoslav era, fit into the western wave of “modern” Islamophobia? One of the characters that have played a significant role in making Serbian Islamophobia and Serbian nationalism go global is the Serb nationalist Srđa Trifković. He has become a self-proclaimed intermediary, connecting the missing dots to earn Western sympathy for the Serbian nationalist cause, by finding the common ground of Islamophobia. By using Serbian Nationalism as his fundament for Islamophobic ideas, he in turn uses the latter

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 279

<sup>34</sup> (Simons, 2006)

<sup>35</sup> (Iversen, 2023)

to validate the former<sup>36</sup>. As he is in many ways portrays the situation of Serbia as one that is under threat by Islam and as the West as the necessary guardian and saviour, it can be argued that his views are in line with the old Antemurale-myth in Serbia, that of protection against the enemy. The main differences are that this time, the enemy is from within, which in turn connects to the change of Western Islamophobia, from alienating the “Orient” to demonizing the internal population hence separating the population and fabricating an us-them (them among us) division. Furthermore, Trifković has gained a position in the American and Anglosaxon highly conservative/populist, right-wing intellectual community, as he also joined the conference “Preserving Western Civilization” that notoriously drew a large number of outspokenly racist and xenophobic guests such as the Canadian psychology professor J. Philippe Rushton, that has for years “been one of the primary voices arguing that races differ biologically in intelligence [...]”<sup>37</sup>. Trifković is in himself not a sufficient embodiment for the tendency of a whole country, but his views are largely a mirror of the various extreme notions within his country that are, unfortunately, not as rare as one might like to think, and even more so, that are backed up by the government of Serbia. One example of this notion is regarding the Srebrenica genocide and the Bosnian war. Trifković has testified three times “[...] as a defence witness in the respective trials of the three Serbian war criminals: Milomir Stakić in 2003, Ljubiša Beara in 2008 and Radovan Karadžić in 2013”<sup>38</sup>, he also holds what is a common opinion of the aggression against Bosnia:

*“(The genocide in Srebrenica was [...] a totem for the new world order, (and that) the relentless Western campaign against the Serbs and in favour of their Muslim foes—which is what ‘Srebrenica’ is really all about—is detrimental to the survival of our (Serb and, by extension, genuine Western) culture and civilization.”*<sup>39</sup>

The idea of Serbian greatness is, as this quote implies, highly interconnected with the idea of Muslim evil, which again is linked to the threat of Serbian identity that are not strictly religious but a combination of ethnicity, religion and political stands. The genocide in Srebrenica is, in the opinion of Trifković, more of a necessary political

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<sup>36</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 91)

<sup>37</sup> (ADL, 2009)

<sup>38</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 96)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 92

campaign, and the above-written statement is eerily similar to that of Njegoš when he describes the canonization of the massacre led by Prince Danilo I in 1702.

## Conclusion

Islamophobia is not a recent phenomenon, and by the definition given in this paper, it has existed since the very beginning of Islam itself. Serbian Islamophobia has mainly manifested itself in three ways. First, in the pre-Ottoman era, through the Antemurale-myth and early religious and nationalistic texts, by defining the enemy as the evil “Other” against a pure and noble people. Secondly, during the Ottoman rule, emerging with the death of Prince Lazar in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, where it was demanded from the “authentic” Serb that he rejected any form of alliance with the “Turks” or adherence to the culture and rituals that allegedly were imposed upon them. During this period, which culminated with the Serbian-Ottoman Wars between 1876-78, the notion of the enemy shifted from mainly concerning “us versus them” to “them among us”, as the main and true perpetrator was the people who had converted to Islam as they supposedly had “[...] betrayed Serbism and the Serbian ethnocentrism so painstakingly built and cherished by the giants of earlier generations”<sup>40</sup>, hence they were considered to have rendered themselves alien to their country and strangers to their people. Thirdly, in the modern era, that is, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and onward, Islamophobia was developing all over the Western world, thereby, the Serbian Islamophobia found foothold in the xenophobic and anti-Muslim discourse that is so prevalent in many far right and conservative movements in Europe and the US. Relating this discourse to the enduring Serbian Islamophobia demonstrate this global notion is being used by Serbian politicians and scholars to validate Serbian nationalism, whilst interchangeably using Serbian nationalism as a groundwork for Islamophobic ideas. Thus, we see two mutually reinforcing imperatives of which the former builds and justifies the other, and vice versa. It becomes clear then, that separating the nationalism and islamophobia in the case of Serbia is not feasible if we wish to obtain an authentic view of the roots of the current situation. Today, there are still powerful politicians undermining and negating the Serbian role in the genocide in Srebrenica, demonstrating that remembering the history

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<sup>40</sup> (Spahic, 2024, p. 224)

with an emphasis on the victims and criticising the biasness of the hegemonic narratives is of paramount importance. As memoricide is an active tool in disregarding the history of the victim as invalid, hence usurping them from the right to mourn whilst additionally neglecting their present resentment. For a justice and reconciliation to prevail in Serbia, the country needs to actively confront itself with its own past, recognising how its history of anti-Muslim and anti-Serbian sentiment have caused so much hate and ignorance, and how this has, in part, been the very backbone of Serbian nationalism. Rejecting the ideology of Serbism, the ethnocentric approach and the idea of Serbianisation must be the very first step towards peace in the region and towards accepting the reality of multi-ethnicism.

*And that which we call Bosnia is not merely a slip of land in the Balkans; for many of us, Bosnia is an idea, it is the belief that people of different religions, ethnicities and cultural traditions can live together<sup>41</sup>*

– Alija Izetbegovic, former Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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<sup>41</sup> (Alija Izetbegović Foundation , n.d)

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